

TELEKINETIC AND TELEPLASTIC MEDIUMSHIP.

BY E. J. DINGWALL.

- I. *Experimente der Fernbewegung*. By DR. A. FREIHERR VON SCHRENCK-NOTZING. (Stuttgart, 1924.)
- II. *Die okkultische Bewegung in der Gegenwart*. By PROF. KARL MARBE. (*Preussische Jahrbücher*, Bd. 197; Heft 1; Juli, 1924, pp. 47-59.)
- III. *Experimente zur Fernbewegung: eine kritische Erörterung*. By DR. ALBERT HELLWIG. (*Literaturblatt Beilage zur Frankfurter Zeitung*, Juni 20, 1924.)
- IV. *Experimente an einem telekinetischen Medium. Untersuchungen an einigen okkultischen Medien*. By PROF. HANS HENNING. (*Ztschr. f. Psychol. und Physiol.*, 1924, Bd. 94, Heft 5, 6, pp. 278-292).
- V. *Die Krise des Okkultismus*. By PROF. MAX DESOIR. (*Vossische Zeitung*, Juli 13, 1924.)
- VI. *Der Betrug des Mediums Ladislaus Laszlo*. By DR. A. FREIHERR VON SCHRENCK-NOTZING. (Leipzig, 1924.)

THE importance of a new contribution to human knowledge can often be estimated by a consideration of the attacks made upon it by the learned world. The scientific mind is, unfortunately, only too often divided into watertight compartments, and presents the strange spectacle of the true and the false, the sublime and the ridiculous, all flourishing under the same mask of a united personality. In the ordinary sciences of to-day, religion has but little influence. The biologist does not fear that by presenting his work he is encroaching upon the domain of the Almighty, neither does the geologist regret that his results do not appear to tally with the statements in the Book. Facts concerning natural phenomena are now only condemned for these reasons in such places as Kentucky or the Kingsway Hall, whilst serious minded people smile quietly and pass on. But in psychical

research the scientist joins the priest, and the philosopher the journalist in deriding phenomena just as real and objective as the meteor or the eclipse. As long as reports were confined to the novelist or to the seeker after wonders, the learned world could afford to smile disdainfully and proceed on its way, but when the facts were reported by men of science themselves the case assumed quite a different complexion. The more important the record the greater the attack, and the more virulent the abuse from all quarters. Even if in England we have failed to realise the importance of Dr. von Schrenck-Notzing's contribution (I), in Germany the attacks made upon it reflect great credit upon its author. For the truth is that it is by far the most important work on telekinesis since the S.P.R. Report on Palladino or Dr. Ochrowicz's observations on Mlle T. Torn from the centre of spiritistic circles in which he was becoming rapidly hardened through the traditions of the time, young Willy Schneider was taken by Dr. von Schrenck and educated with a view to a single purpose. That goal in brief was to train the mediumistic faculty so that the same phenomenon could be repeated under the same conditions at specified times and before varying observers. It is in the achievement of this purpose that the importance of Dr. von Schrenck's record may be said principally to lie. The methods of control and the phenomena observed are substantially the same as those described in the *Journal* for October, 1922. Control consists broadly in the holding of the medium's hands and wrists by two persons and the outlining of his body by luminous pins. Phenomena occur usually 1 m. 10 cm. from the medium and are not hindered by the presence of an intervening gauze screen. Four methods were used: (A) the medium within a gauze enclosed structure and the objects to be moved upon a table in front of the observers. (B) The medium sitting freely in a chair and the objects enclosed within a gauze cage about 1 m. 10 cm. from the medium. (C) The medium and the objects being 1 m. 10 cm. apart, the latter being separated from the observers by a four-winged gauze screen. (D) The medium and sitters being entirely cut off from the objects by a gauze enclosure. In all these four cases the medium is held by two persons as described above. (See I., Abb. 3-6, p. 43.)

Besides printing an account of his own sittings, Dr. von Schrenck records those held in the Psychological Institute of Munich University. The same phenomena were witnessed repeatedly under the same conditions and, as far as can be gathered from the reports, no member of the examining commission came to unfavourable opinions as to the authenticity of the phenomena presented. The record is mainly one of impressions and observations. Fresh experiments were not apparently encouraged if we except the tunnel apparatus described on pp. 11, 12. In his attempt to describe the phenomena Dr. von Schrenck leans towards the hypothesis of teleplastic structures proceeding from the medium (pp. 44, 47, 49), a theory to which colour is lent by the fact that the mesh of the gauze is opened when the objects are separated from the medium (pp. 46, 47). Similarly the experiment with tissue paper described on p. 48 supports the same hypothesis, and the observations printed on pp. 14, 16, 23, 46 and 163 will especially interest those few amongst us who have ever attempted to examine the physical phenomena from this point of view.

Recognising the immense importance of the book and the unanswerable character of the records, German students who had the reputation of being hard-headed sceptics set about to devise suitable replies. At least two avenues of attack were open. One was to declare that the whole thing was ridiculous, a preposterous and futile farce which could be left unnoticed. Professor Karl Marbe adopted this course and (*incredibile dictu*) the *Preussische Jahrbücher* opened its columns in hospitality (II). Beginning with Steiner he passes to the sideric pendulum and the divining rod, proceeding to tell us that "up till now there is not the slightest proof of telepathy" (p. 53). From telepathy Professor Marbe passes to Dr. von Schrenck, but obviously cannot find any flaw in the control or in the results. He therefore resorts to ridicule and aspersions concerning Willy's character and conduct. Finally in a burst of almost hysterical frenzy he thus describes the book. It is, he says, only "ein Album der Blamage, sondern auch als eine Publikation, die mit den wahren Interessen des Volkes im Widerspruch steht" (p. 59) [not only a publication which makes the author ridiculous, but also one which conflicts

with the true interests of the people]. Dr. Hellwig is calmer than Professor Marbe (III). He has read the book *sine ira et studio* and has made "hundreds and hundreds of critical notes," but unfortunately, he gives us no striking example of them, contenting himself with vague complaints, such as the lack of light and Willy's aversion to apparatus. The second avenue of attack was adopted by Prof. Henning (IV). It consists essentially in the production of a person who can present all the phenomena of Willy Schneider under the same control conditions and yet manage to produce them fraudulently. Professor Henning has accomplished this grand feat. He has discovered a Russian medium whose name he forgets to give us. This person, under the full light of three half-watt lamps of sixty candle power each, works in the centre of the investigators. Objects, such as a large book, a tray, a china plate, a newspaper or a walking stick rise into the air at a distance from the medium and float to any observer at command. A cigarette case opens itself and a cigarette floats out of it finally settling in the medium's mouth. The phenomena are just as good if the medium's hands and feet are held. Control of the medium's person can be insisted upon not only before and after the sittings but at any time during the production of phenomena. None of the observers could explain the manifestations, and no confederates were necessary, "*nur zwei fast mikroskopische kleine Behelfe*" [only two almost microscopic little devices] which could be used without the help of hands, feet or head.

Professor Henning's contribution to the *Zeitschrift für Psychologie* may be interesting to those engaged in the analysis of dreams according to the Freudian interpretation. But as a practical contribution the story is spoiled by Professor Henning revealing some of the amazing methods of this modern Yogi. The first device is a piece of thread on the end of which is a ball of wax and the second is a soup spoon in the sleeve for levitating a table—but we will not continue. It will merely suffice to add that this amusing skit by Professor Henning has actually been taken seriously in Germany in the same way as Dr. Mercier's *Spirit Experiences* was accepted in certain quarters in England. Professor Max Dessoir published a laudatory article in the *Vossische Zeitung* (V). He proposes

that Willy shall be tested by Henning's Russian medium, but we fear that the latter is even more shadowy than the phantoms produced by the former. The fact alone of Henning's skits being treated seriously by such a prominent scholar as Professor Dessoir indicates the amount of animosity prevalent abroad on the subject of Baron von Schrenck's experiments with Willy Schneider. For the experiments form a solid basis upon which to work, and Baron von Schrenck was indeed fortunate to obtain the help of such a medium as Willy Schneider. The easy and at the same time efficient methods of control are typical of what can be done with a good medium for telekinesis.

How different are the problems presented by teleplastic mediumship! In the one case control is simple if only the medium can be persuaded to consent to it. In the other control is difficult even when the medium offers himself apparently unreservedly. In my discussion of the problems involved in the case of Eva C.¹ I tried to point out how difficult it is to prevent objects being smuggled into the séance room despite the utmost vigilance on the part of the controllers, and Dr. von Schrenck in his turn criticised my objections in the *Proceedings* for 1923. In the first paragraph of that criticism Dr. von Schrenck compares his experiments with Eva C. with those with Willy Schneider. But the comparison is, I think, invalid, since telekinetic mediumship differs entirely from teleplastic mediumship in methods of control. In dealing with the control of Willy Schneider I have said elsewhere that my objections to the Baron's control of Willy would be as strong as those against his control of Eva C. *were Willy to sit for teleplasm.*² There is no doubt whatever in my own mind that Eva C., Willy Schneider, Jan Guzik, Pasquale Erto, etc., *can* bring objects into the séance room in spite of the control exercised in Munich, London or Paris. Moreover the recent case of Erto shows quite conclusively that such is the case in at least one instance. But the important point to emphasise is not what the mediums can bring in, but what use they can make of what they do bring in. Willy no doubt *can* bring in a telescopic rod, but of what use is it to him? None whatever. With telekinesis the con-

¹ *Proceedings*, 1922, 309-331.

² *Journal*, 1922, p. 370.

trollers can prevent mediums using their apparatus presupposing such to be brought with them. With teleplastic mediumship the apparatus *is* the phenomenon. Judgment must not be founded upon a sure control, although a good deal can be done in this direction. It must seek a firmer basis upon the appearance and (above all) behaviour of the phenomenon itself. A dummy hand swathed in cotton wool does not behave like that described upon p. 678 of Professor Richet's *Traité de Métapsychique* (2^e éd.), neither does a dummy head resemble that mentioned by Dr. Geley on p. 13 of the *Bulletin* of the Inst. Gén.-Psychol. (Nos. 1-3, Paris, 1918). But since we cannot dictate as to what supernormal phenomena must or must not resemble, the case becomes even more complicated. And in this very complication lies part of the secret of the tragic and at the same time farcical story of Ladislaus Laszlo (VI). Laszlo was an electrical artisan and is generally considered to be neuropathic. In December 1921 he made the acquaintance of M. Wilhelm Tordai, who was legally connected with the Finance Ministry at Budapest. Asking to be investigated, Laszlo attracted the attention of M. Tordai who became convinced of the authenticity of the phenomena and formed a circle for their investigation. The conditions were the same as those usually obtaining at such experiments. Before the sitting Laszlo changed his clothes, donned a bathing costume and occasionally took a bath. The cabinet and surroundings were also said to be carefully examined. Dim white light was used together with red light or sometimes total darkness. Besides producing alleged teleplasm, luminous phenomena were observed. In this connection it is interesting and highly illuminating to read the accounts of the observers *before* the exposure. I select the following passages and translate them *verbatim*.

"Luminous phenomena appeared, at first close to the medium's body but latterly at a distance of several metres from him. The size of these lights varied from that of a pea to that of a pigeon's egg. At times these lights moved in rapid zig-zag lines resembling comets. . . ."

"A trembling of the whole body then set in. The hands and feet become cold. Saliva in abundance drops to the ground. After the flow of saliva there emerges from the mouth a band of plasma 3 cm. broad and 20 cm. long."

On April 24th, 1923, a special test took place. The medium was stripped, searched, and taken to a special room containing the minimum of furniture. A purgative was administered, the stomach pump was employed and he was watched for twenty-four hours before being taken to the séance room. At the sitting four photographs were taken of alleged teleplasm emerging from the mouth. They show a strip 5 to 6 cm. broad and 60 to 70 cms. long. At other sittings the medium wore a veil as in the case of Eva C. The director thus describes the phenomenon.

"At this experiment I had slipped my hands under the veil, separating it with forefinger and thumb and keeping it as far away from the mouth of the medium as possible. With the surface of my hand I controlled and guided involuntarily the movements of the plasma. This time again, we could clearly observe, in the red light, the withdrawal of the substance through the veil and afterwards ascertain that the veil was intact" (p. 6).

In criticising this account Baron von Schrenck compares the photograph with those taken with Eva C. and Stanislaw P. He declares that with Eva the mouth is wide open and the veil is not drawn into the cavity whilst with Stanislaw a small portion of the substance is seen inside the veil.¹

How far Baron von Schrenck is correct in this assertion I am not prepared to say. During the sittings with Eva in London it was observed that the veil was drawn into Eva's mouth, and I published a statement upon that very point.² Moreover it appears to me that in Fig. 155 the veil is again drawn into Eva's mouth, and I cannot think that the case of Stanislaw P. can be called conclusive from the fact that a portion of the substance is seen behind the mesh apparently inside it.

The apparent vitality of the substance was also noticed by the Hungarian observers. With red light falling directly upon the plasma a piece was seen upon the ground at a distance of 60 cm. from the medium. "As if attached to an invisible

¹ See *Materialisations-Phaenomene*, 2^e Aufl., figs. 155, 213.

² *Proceedings*, 1922, p. 322.

thread, it crawled to his feet, climbing up the body and disappeared into the mouth." ¹

Upon other occasions the observers handled the substance. The report reads: "A few seconds later, the white, cold and foam-like plasma which lay on our hands withdrew into the medium's mouth" (p. 7). Upon hearing of the marvels Baron von Schrenck visited Budapest and had four sittings with Laszlo.

In his published accounts it is clear that he was far from satisfied with the phenomena and general conditions. Indeed at the conclusion of the series, he wrote to M. Tordai expressing his uncertainties. He advised him to so seize the phenomenon and ascertain its real nature. M. Tordai, however, disregarded his advice and gave a lecture upon Laszlo's mediumship. A professional showman was present at the lecture, and, approaching Laszlo offered him an engagement. To him Laszlo confessed that the whole thing was fraudulent, and proofs of his guilt were finally established. One of the sitters had assisted him and examples of the substance in the shape of old pieces of muslin soaked in fat, etc., were discovered.

In Dr. von Schrenck's pungent criticism of the case two principal points are raised. His first objection is that the products were so artificial in appearance that they had to be regarded with extreme scepticism. Now it is clear from the passages I have quoted above that the Hungarian observers were quite convinced of the authenticity of the phenomena even though they themselves may have noticed marks of artificiality. It is to be remarked that they reported self-mobility, change of form and the passage of the substance through the veil. Indeed from their reports it is difficult to understand how the deception was carried on unless we remember the religious atmosphere of the performances. Passages from the Bible were read and the medium's guide, "Dr. Grunhut," gave salutary advice. The circle had instituted the best

¹ Cf. *Mat.-Phaen.*, Figs. 128 and 130 where in the one case the substance lies on the medium's chest supported by a black thread from the mouth and in the other (the second photograph) the same appearance is seen suspended from the breasts, the black thread being entangled with it.

control they could devise and it can scarcely be contended that it was not severe. It is true that it was totally inefficient, like that of the medium Erto, but it was the best these inexperienced observers could suggest. In spite of all the medium succeeded in smuggling in his apparatus. Even the artificial appearance of the products cannot be considered proof of their normal origin. Dr. von Schrenck himself would scarcely deny, I think, that certain of the productions of Eva C. and Stanislaw P. suffer from the same objection.¹ The answer to this point Dr. von Schrenck himself partly furnishes when he speaks of the control of the hands. For if the hands are held then the arrangement of the products becomes a matter of some difficulty. Laszlo's hands were sometimes held and sometimes not. Often the hands were free behind the curtains between the appearance of different phenomena.² Scrupulous, though inefficient, in the bodily control, the Hungarian enquirers failed to perceive the enormous importance of the hand-control. It is this inability to discriminate the important from the unimportant, not only in actual sittings but in considering the literature of the subject, that is at the root of many of the difficulties of psychical research. For if observers cannot distinguish the differences between, we will say, the phenomena of Willy Schneider and those of Palladino, or of Laszlo and Eva C., then the results can never be accepted by serious students. The history of Laszlo is not more incredible than the amazing performances of Eldred whose exploits were the wonder of the spiritualistic world for some two years. A solid basis for our work can only be found in such laborious series of experiments as those conducted by Baron von Schrenck with the medium Willy Schneider. If this series contrasted with the Laszlo series teaches us anything, it is the radical differences of treatment necessary in the investigation of telekinetic and teleplastic mediumship.

¹ Cf. *Mat.-Phaen.*, Figs, 36, 82, 88, 110, 137, 149, 209, etc.

² Dr. Geley in his account of his sittings with Eva C. (*L'Ectoplasmie et la Clairvoyance*) (Paris, 1924) says (p. 198):—"Je répète que ses mains restaient toujours en vue et tenues [*italics his*] en dehors des rideaux." An examination of his accompanying photographs show that in the only four which show both hands, in one only is one hand held!